



October 13, 2011

Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Commissioners:

Leadership North Carolina is a leadership development organization with a statewide focus. Participants in our program come from every corner of North Carolina, and through my work with them, I have come to realize that the rural areas of our state are at a noted disadvantage because they lack reliable high-speed Internet access.

That's why I am writing you. I believe the Federal Communications Commission should do whatever it can to encourage the proliferation of broadband service, and particularly, wireless broadband, which is the technology of the future. Today, businesses rely on smartphones, tablet applications and laptops to keep employees connected with customers, vendors and colleagues. We, as a nation, need to meet President Obama's goal of delivering broadband to every part of our country. This fact is driven home each month as the 50 leaders from across our state convene using the latest technology to stay connected, interact with one another and collaborate to meet our state's most pressing needs.

The merger proposal currently before you concerning AT&T and T-Mobile (WT 11-65) is a significant response to this challenge. We should encourage private enterprise to fund improvements in our digital infrastructure, and this merger would do just that. It comes with a commitment from AT&T to expand its advanced wireless network to reach over 97 percent of Americans, which would go a long way toward meeting President Obama's stated goal.

Leaders in rural North Carolina and rural America know that they are at a disadvantage when it comes to bringing jobs and investment to their communities. Without assurance of broadband availability, few businesses will consider relocating to these areas, and existing businesses will face difficulty in achieving success. For years, economic development has hinged on access to electricity, natural gas, water, sewer and transportation infrastructure. Today and going forward, broadband must be a part of the menu of needs all businesses need to thrive.

Access to the cutting-edge wireless broadband offered in this merger would bring immense value to the entire nation. We hope you recognize this opportunity and give the AT&T/T-Mobile merger your support. It is the kind of action that will show future leaders of North Carolina that rural areas can catch up and compete with urban centers.

Thank you for your attention,



Brian C. Etheridge  
President  
Leadership North Carolina

cc:

Chairman Julius Genachowski  
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn  
Commissioner Michael Copps  
Commissioner Robert McDowell